



Employment Relations Specialist – Legal

Position Description

Team:	People and Culture / Employee Relations	Location:	Auckland or Wellington / by agreement
Reports to:	General Manager, Employee Relations		
Role Type:	Permanent		

About Us

KiwiRail’s Role in Aotearoa, New Zealand

KiwiRail, a proud State-Owned Enterprise, delivers sustainable and inclusive growth for our customers, communities, and people.

For more than 150 years, rail in New Zealand has connected communities, delivered freight and passengers around the country, and showcased our spectacular scenery to the world. Our purpose—Hononga Whaikaha, Oranga mo Aotearoa (Stronger Connections, Better New Zealand)—speaks to connection with our customers and the future needs of their businesses, connection with the communities we serve and operate in, and connection with each other. KiwiRail is carrying this legacy into the future, delivering connected rail and shipping transport services that create economic, social, and environmental value for New Zealand and New Zealanders.

Our Workplace

At KiwiRail, our values define the behaviour we expect from everyone. We have a team of over 4500 people, and every connection we make with each other, our union partners, our customers and all our stakeholders must be of the highest standard.



Safety, health, and well-being are our number one priority, ensuring our people return home safe and healthy every day.

About the Role

Purpose of the role

KiwiRail is in a phase of significant transformation to modernise and grow our rail and Interislander ferry services in Aotearoa. The Employment Relations Specialist – Legal is part of the People and Culture team and provides specialist employment relations and employment law expertise to support constructive union partnerships, collective bargaining, complex employment matters, organisational change, and legally robust decision-making. The role translates KiwiRail's people strategy into practical employment relations outcomes and supports leaders with clear, pragmatic advice that balances fairness, risk, operational requirements and commercial outcomes.

Key Accountabilities

Within the area of responsibility, this role is required to:

- Provide specialist employment relations and employment law advice to senior leaders, managers, People Partners and internal stakeholders as part of the People and Culture team.
- Act as a lead advocate or strategist in collective bargaining, union engagement forums, Engagement initiatives and implementation of collective agreement outcomes.
- Support organisational change programmes by ensuring ER strategy, employment law advice, consultation processes and risk management are integrated from the outset.
- Provide high level strategic, technical and practical expertise on complex employment matters, including personal grievances, mediations, litigation, investigations, disciplinary processes and settlement approaches.
- Provide legally robust, practical and commercially focused advice on employment-related risk within the People and Culture function.
- Maintain current knowledge of employment legislation, case law and regulatory developments, and translate implications into policy, practice and leader guidance, providing regular briefings to People Partners on changes that may impact ER case management.
- Work closely with external employment lawyers, where appropriate, including supporting instructions, oversight, advice quality and cost-effective use where specialist legal input is required.

Key challenges

- Balancing strong union partnerships, legal risk, operational requirements and strategic transformation priorities.
- Providing clear, practical advice on complex and sensitive employment matters in a highly unionised environment.
- Ensuring organisational change, collective bargaining and employment litigation are managed consistently, lawfully and commercially.
- Influencing leaders and stakeholders to adopt robust ER and legal processes while maintaining momentum on business outcomes.

Key Relationships Here are the key relationships relevant to this role		Manage /Lead	Deliver to	Collaborate with	Advise or inform
Internal	Senior leaders and people leaders		✓	✓	✓
	P&C People Partners		✓	✓	✓
	People and Culture leadership team		✓	✓	✓
	Operational and project leadership teams		✓	✓	✓

	Health, Safety and Wellbeing teams			✓	✓
External	Unions and union representatives		✓	✓	✓
	External legal counsel		✓	✓	✓
	Mediators, Employment Relations Authority and Employment Court		✓	✓	✓
	HR suppliers, EAP and service providers			✓	✓

What you will do to contribute

Health Safety and Wellbeing	• Implement safety procedures and ensure team compliance • Analyse workplace risks and develop mitigation strategies • Promote a culture of safety and wellbeing within your team • Respond effectively to safety incidents and near-misses • Support team members' physical and mental health
Customer Focus	• Provide a positive customer experience • Support a customer-focused culture at KiwiRail • Know our services well and explain them to customers • Respond quickly to customer needs • Develop solutions to meet customer requirements • Solve complex customer issues • Work with colleagues to improve customer outcomes
High Performing Teams Skills	• Set clear performance standards aligned with KiwiRail's goal • Build a supportive and cooperative team environment • Provide timely and constructive feedback • Actively seek diverse perspectives in problem-solving • Identify opportunities for coaching and mentoring
Commercial Acumen	• Plan and monitor resource allocation to achieve team objectives • Consider financial implications when making recommendations • Understand and comply with procurement guidelines • Work with suppliers to ensure quality outcomes • Recognise how financial decisions impact KiwiRail's overall position
Employment Relations and Employment Law	• Provide specialist advice on employment law, collective agreements, personal grievances, disciplinary matters, investigations and dispute resolution. • Support legally robust ER processes, including consultation, mediation, litigation preparation and settlement documentation. • Identify, assess and escalate legal and regulatory risks early, with practical options for resolution.

**Industrial Relations and
Union Engagement**

- Act as a lead advocate or strategist in collective bargaining, engagement forums, union engagement and implementation of agreed outcomes.
- Build constructive relationships with unions while protecting KiwiRail's legal, commercial and operational interests.
- Support leaders to resolve workplace issues early and consistently.

**Employment Law
Capability and Governance**

- Maintain up to date knowledge on employment legislation and case law, providing employment law expertise within People and Culture to support consistent, fair and legally robust decision-making.
 - Coordinate external legal advice where required, including instructions, advice quality and cost management.
 - Translate employment law developments into policy, practice, leader guidance and ER capability building.
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Decision Making

The position is accountable for providing specialist employment relations and employment law expertise as part of the People and Culture team, informing operational, people, bargaining and risk decisions across KiwiRail.

Key decision-making requirements of the position include:

- Recommending ER and legal strategies for complex employment matters, including grievances, investigations, mediation and litigation.
- Strategy and advice on collective bargaining, union engagement and implementation of agreed outcomes.
- Assessing legal, reputational, operational and industrial risk and escalating where required.
- Determining when external legal advice is required and supporting instructions, oversight and cost management.

Human Resources Delegations	Nil
Direct reports	Nil
Finance Delegations	Nil Operating Nil Capex, subject to delegated authority
Budget (operating and capital)	Nil
Travel Delegations	Nil
Statutory powers	Nil

Physical demands and the nature of work

This role is administration-based and requires:

- prolonged sitting and high computer usage
- limited walking, standing, twisting, bending (at the waist), crouching (bend knee)
- carrying of laptop and paperwork when alternating between home and office
- limited lifting of up to 7 kg archive boxes

Your role may include other tasks suited to your level, as your manager directs. This job description shows your current update it with you if your responsibilities change.

About you

Knowledge and experience

- You have significant experience in employment relations or employment law within a law firm or large, complex organisation.
- You have demonstrated lead advocate experience in collective bargaining and union engagement and implementation of collective agreement outcomes.
- You have in-depth knowledge of New Zealand employment legislation, case law, good faith obligations and employment dispute resolution processes.
- You can provide specialist/expert advice on complex employment matters, including grievances, investigations, performance, disciplinary processes, mediation and litigation risk.
- You understand how ER strategy, employment relations advice and organisational change processes support business transformation, operational performance and constructive union relationships.
- You have strong written and oral communication skills and can tailor advice for various audiences including senior leaders, operational managers, HR teams, unions and other stakeholders.

Ways of working / Work-related qualities

- You act with integrity, discretion and sound judgement in sensitive and high-risk matters.
- You provide clear, practical and legally robust advice that balances risk, fairness, operational need and commercial outcomes.
- You build trusted relationships and influence effectively across senior leaders, people leaders, HR teams, unions and stakeholders.
- You remain composed in complex or high-pressure situations and help others navigate ambiguity.
- You work collaboratively and proactively within People and Culture, identifying issues early and supporting consistent ER and employment law practice across KiwiRail.

Other Requirements

- You can pass regular drug and alcohol screening requirements.
- You have a current and valid NZ Driver's Licence, or the ability to travel as required.
- You can represent KiwiRail professionally in mediation, union engagement and employment-related external forums.

Qualifications

You need:

- A law degree and current practising certificate and relevant professional experience in employment law, employment relations, collective bargaining or dispute resolution.

**CREATING
STRONGER
CONNECTIONS**

